

CLAIMS

1. A method for providing online comparison shopping by a website system accessible by a user through a communication network, the method comprising the steps of:

5 compiling a shopping list identifying specific items to be purchased;
 receiving optimization criteria specified by the user;
 optimizing, by the website system, the shopping list based on the optimization
criteria to produce an optimal shopping order; and
 displaying the optimal shopping order to the user if the optimal shopping
10 order exists.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 receiving the user's modifications to the optimal shopping order;
 re-optimizing the shopping list based on the modifications to produce an
updated optimal shopping order; and

15 displaying the updated optimal shopping order to the user.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 receiving an acceptance of the optimal shopping order from the user; and
 processing the optimal shopping order in response to the receipt of the
20 acceptance from the user.

4. The method of claim 3, further comprising:
receiving shipment tracking information from multiple vendors for all items
identified in the optimal shopping order; and
displaying the shipment tracking information to the user.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the shipment tracking information identifies a
plurality of different tracking numbers corresponding to the multiple vendors'
shipments of all items identified in the optimal shopping order.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein, in the receiving step, the optimization criteria
include at least one of the following the lowest total cost including shipping and
sales tax for all items identified in the optimal shopping list, vendor preference,
vendor dislikes, a user-preferred shipping method, the fastest delivery time for the
all items identified in the optimal shopping list, item availability, total order cost, and
price range.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

providing by the websites system a website accessible by the user for
receiving inputs from the user to perform at least one of the compiling step,
identifying step, and displaying step.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
reporting an optimization failure to the user if the optimizing step does not
produce an optimal shopping order.
9. The method of claim 8, further comprising:
5 repeating said optimizing step until an optimal shopping order is produced;
and
notifying the user when the optimal shopping order is produced.
10. The method of claim 1, wherein the optimizing step is performed off-line, and
the method further comprises:
10 notifying the user with a notification message when the off-line optimizing
step is completed.
11. The method of claim 10, wherein, in the notifying step, the notification
message is communicated to the user using one of the following: an e-mail, a
pager, a phone, a facsimile, and a PDA (personal digital assistant).
12. The method of claim 10, wherein the notification message includes a unique
15 identifier to be used by the user to access the optimal shopping order through the
website system.

13. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving the user's modifications to the optimal shopping order;

receiving a request from the user to perform only a recalculation of a total cost for the optimal shopping order;

5 recalculating, in response to the user's request, the total cost for the optimal shopping order based on the user's modifications to produce an updated optimal shopping order; and

displaying the updated optimal shopping order to the user.

14. A computer program embodied on computer readable media readable by a computer system, for providing online comparison shopping, the computer system being a website system accessible by a user through a communication network, the computer program product comprising computer executable instructions for:

compiling a shopping list identifying specific items to be purchased;

receiving optimization criteria specified by the user;

15 optimizing, by the website system, the shopping list based on the optimization criteria to produce an optimal shopping order; and

displaying the optimal shopping order to the user if the optimal shopping order exists.

15. The computer program product of claim 14, further comprising computer
20 executable instructions for:

receiving the user's modifications to the optimal shopping order;
re-optimizing the shopping list based on the modifications to produce an
updated optimal shopping order; and
displaying the updated optimal shopping order to the user.

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16. The computer program product of claim 14, further comprising computer
executable instructions for:

receiving an acceptance of the optimal shopping order from the user; and
processing the optimal shopping order in response to the receipt of the
acceptance from the user.

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17. The computer program product of claim 16, further comprising computer
executable instructions for:

receiving shipment tracking information from multiple vendors for all items
identified in the optimal shopping order; and

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displaying the shipment tracking information to the user.

18. The computer program product of claim 17, wherein the shipment tracking
information identifies a plurality of different tracking numbers corresponding to the
multiple vendors' shipments of all items identified in the optimal shopping order.

19. The computer program product of claim 14, wherein the optimization criteria include at least one of the following: the lowest total cost including shipping and sales tax for all items identified in the optimal shopping list, vendor preference, vendor dislikes, a user-preferred shipping method, the fastest delivery time for the all items identified in the optimal shopping list, item availability, total order cost, and price range.

20. The computer program product of claim 14, further comprising computer executable instructions for:

providing by the websites system a website accessible by the user for receiving inputs from the user.

21. The computer program product of claim 14, further comprising computer executable instructions for:

reporting an optimization failure to the user if the optimizing does not produce an optimal shopping order.

22. The computer program product of claim 21, further comprising computer executable instructions for:

repeating said optimizing until an optimal shopping order is produced; and notifying the user when the optimal shopping order is produced.

23. The computer program product of claim 14, wherein the optimizing is performed off-line, and the computer program product further comprises computer executable instructions for:

notifying the user with a notification message when the off-line optimizing is completed.

24. The computer program product of claim 23, wherein the notification message is communicated to the user using one of the following:

an e-mail, a pager, a phone, a facsimile, and a PDA (personal digital assistant).

25. The computer program product of claim 23, wherein the notification message includes an identifier to be used by the user to access the optimal shopping order from the website system.

26. The computer program product of claim 14, further comprising computer executable instructions for:

receiving the user's modifications to the optimal shopping order;
receiving a request from the user to perform only a recalculation of a total cost for the optimal shopping order;
recalculating, in response to the user's request, the total cost for the optimal

shopping order based on the user's modifications to produce an updated optimal shopping order; and

displaying the updated optimal shopping order to the user.

27. A website system for providing online comparison shopping, the system comprising:

an interface for receiving inputs from the user through a communication network;

a processor, operatively coupled to the interface, for compiling a shopping list identifying specific items to be purchased based on the inputs from the user and receiving optimization criteria specified by the user from the interface; and

an optimization module, operatively coupled to the processor, for optimizing the shopping list based on the optimization criteria to produce an optimal shopping order,

wherein the optimal shopping order is displayed to the user.

28. The system of claim 27, wherein the optimization module receives the user's modifications to the optimal shopping order from the interface, and re-optimizes the optimal shopping order based on the user's modifications to produce an updated optimal shopping order, and wherein the updated optimal shopping order is displayed to the user.

29. The system of claim 27, wherein the interface receives an acceptance of the optimal shopping order from the user, and the processor processes the optimal shopping order in response to the acceptance of the optimal shopping order.

30. The system of claim 29, further comprising:

5 a shipment tracking interface, operatively coupled to the processor, for receiving shipment tracking information from multiple vendors for all items identified in the optimal shopping order through the communication network, and communicating the shipment tracking information to the user through the interface.

31. The system of claim 30, wherein the shipment tracking information identifies a plurality of different tracking numbers corresponding to the multiple vendors' shipments of all items identified in the optimal shopping order.

32. The system of claim 27, wherein the optimization criteria include at least one of the following: the lowest total cost including shipping and sales tax for all items identified in the optimal shopping list, vendor preference, vendor dislikes, a user-
15 preferred shipping method, the fastest delivery time for the all items identified in the optimal shopping list, item availability, total order cost, and price range.

33. The system of claim 27, wherein the processor provides a website accessible by the user for receiving inputs from the user.

34. The system of claim 27, further comprising:

a storage, accessible by the processor, for storing vendor information, vendor's shipping method information, and product information.

35. The system of claim 27, wherein the optimization module notifies the user when its shopping order optimization process fails.

36. The system of claim 35, wherein the optimization module repeats its shopping order optimization process until an optimal shopping order is produced, and the processor notifies the user when the optimization process produces the optimal shopping order.

37. The system of claim 27, wherein the processor receives, from the interface, the user's modifications to the optimal shopping order and a request from the user to perform only a recalculation of a total cost for the optimal shopping order, and recalculates, in response to the user's request, the total cost for the optimal shopping order based on the user's modifications to produce an updated optimal shopping order, and wherein the updated optimal shopping order is displayed to the user.